

RICIN FACT SHEET

What is ricin?

Ricin is a poison made from the waste left over from processing castor beans. It can be found in the form of a powder, mist or pellet.

How can you be exposed to ricin?

It will take a deliberate act to make ricin and use it to poison people. You can be exposed to it through breathing in the mist or powder or swallowing ricin-contaminated water or food. Pellets of ricin, or ricin dissolved in a liquid, can be injected into a person's body. *Ricin poisoning is not contagious.* It cannot be spread from person to person through casual contact.

What are the symptoms of ricin poisoning?

Major symptoms of ricin poisoning depend on the route and the amount of dose received.

- **Skin and eye contact:** the symptoms are redness and pain of the skin and eyes.
- **Inhalation:** Initial symptoms of inhaling ricin may occur within **8** hours of exposure. The symptoms are difficulty breathing, fever, cough, nausea, and tightness in the chest. Heavy sweating, fluid building up in lungs, low blood pressure, breathing failure may occur, leading to death.
- **Ingestion:** Initial symptoms of ingesting ricin may occur in less than **6** hours. The symptoms are vomiting, diarrhea, severe dehydration, low blood pressure, hallucinations, seizures, and blood in urine.

Death from ricin can take place within 36 to 72 hours of exposure, based on the route and the amount of dose received. If death has not occurred in 3 to 5 days, the victim usually recovers.

How is ricin poisoning treated?

There is no antidote that exists for ricin. Ricin poisoning is treated by giving victims supportive medical care to minimize the effects of the poisoning.

What should you do if you think you have been exposed to ricin?

If you are near a release of ricin, your local authorities may tell you to either evacuate the area or "*shelter in place*" inside a building to avoid being exposed.

If you think you have been exposed, move quickly to an area where fresh air is available. Remove your clothing by cutting them off the body; if possible do not pull the clothes over your head. Quickly wash your entire body with large amounts of soap and water. If your eyes are burning or your vision is blurred, rinse them with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes. If you wear contacts, wash your hands after removing contaminated clothes and then remove the contacts before rinsing your eyes.

If you wear eye glasses, remove and wash them with soap and water. You can put your eyeglasses back on after you wash them. Place your contaminated clothes and contact lenses into a plastic bag and seal. Place the bag into a second plastic bag and seal. If ricin has been ingested, do not drink fluids or induce vomiting. **Call 911 for medical attention right away and removal of the contaminated items. Do not drive yourself to the hospital as you may become very ill on your way.**

Where you can get more information on ricin?

Regional Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222)

www.bt.cdc.gov/

www.dshs.state.tx.us

www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/rtkweb/rtkhsfs.htm

Source of information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)